

Kōwhai Programme

Support for whānau & carers

Managing Fatigue

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is a persistent sense of tiredness, to the point that you cannot do what you normally do. Sound familiar? You may even wake up feeling tired. Both patients and carers can experience fatigue. It is common for people caring for someone with a palliative illness to feel fatigued and is likely to increase over time.

Caregiving is a special and rewarding role, but it is also hard work. It is important to recognise and acknowledge fatigue so that you can take care of yourself and continue caring for your family member.

It is really important that carers look after their own health needs and seek treatment as needed.

Looking After Yourself:

Time out for yourself to re-energise and refresh your body and mind is just as important as the care you are providing.

Remember:

- Self-care is a priority **NOT** a luxury.
- **You do not have to do everything yourself.**
- Look at what others can do to help out.
- Take breaks and do something you enjoy in this time.
- Try and get enough sleep, nap during the day if needed.
- Invite friends around whose company you enjoy.
- Each day schedule an enjoyable activity, just for you.

It is important to know that the relationship between the person who is ill and their carer can become stressed if both are exhausted.

Remember that it is the person's condition, not their nature, which leads to irritability. If one person is snapping at the other give yourself and the other person a break.

It is important that both the ill person and the carer are willing to accept help from family, friends, and support agencies. If either is reluctant seek support from your healthcare team.

For Patients fatigue is common and may not be relieved by sleep or rest. Some days they may be feeling really tired and unwell, and the next day they may be feeling much more energetic. Fatigue can be caused by many things:

- The body uses energy to fight disease.
- Current and previous treatments and medications.
- Anaemia or low iron levels.
- Eating and drinking less, normal at this time.
- Advanced illness.
- Pain, nausea, diarrhoea or breathing difficulties.
- Psychological impact.

Some possible treatments that you could ask a health professional about:

- Anaemia may be treatable.
- Stimulant medications are helpful for a small number of people, in the short term.
- Adjusting type, dose, timing of medications.
- Treating sleep disturbances.

Some other suggestions:

- Doing a task at a slower pace will reduce the energy needed by up to 3 times.
- Fast walking uses 1½ times as much energy as slow walking.
- Use wheels or slides, rather than lifting or carrying.
- Alternate periods of activity and rest.
- Early afternoon rest or nap is helpful and can help avoid the evening naps which can affect sleep.

The most important step is to discuss fatigue with your healthcare team.

For carers fatigue may be as much mental as physical. Physically you may be working hard, having disturbed sleep, more tasks than you used to. But mentally there is often more to be remembered and taken care of: appointments, prescriptions, health visits, watching over someone – all on top of the usual work and household tasks.

While physical tiredness needs physical rest, often mental tiredness needs movement and exercise, preferably outside in fresh air. This might be as simple as a walk around the garden or to the end of the street or, if possible, allowing yourself time to stretch yourself further. Accept help from others supporting your person while you refresh yourself.

Rest:

- **REST MEANS DOING NOTHING AT ALL.**
- Frequent short rest periods are a must.
- Balance activity with rest and learn to allow time to rest when planning your day.
- Alternate activity and rest during the day. Vary your activities, such as doing an activity just before meals and rest after them.
- Listening to music, or relaxation playlist.
- STOP working and rest BEFORE becoming exhausted, your recovery will be faster.

Relaxation:

Relaxation techniques help people to relax and relieve stress. The trick is finding which ones work for you. Examples of commonly used techniques include:

- Deep breathing.
- Mindfulness.
- Progressive muscle relaxation.
- Meditation.

There are apps for your phone or device that may assist.

Visitors:

Visitors can be welcome but they can also be exhausting. Remember, you don't have to allow them to visit. Ideas to avoid unwanted visitors or phone calls:

- Put a sign on the door.
- Ask visitors to ring before visiting.
- Remind visitors on arrival that you can only have short visits – set a time that works for you.
- Turn your phone off or to silent.
- Use it to screen calls.
- Use an answerphone message or group chat to share information.

Organising Activities:

- Decide together what is most important, so that you can both make sure you spend your time together well.
- What time of day does your loved one feel their best? This is a good time for visitors or to plan activities.
- What time of day are they most often tired? Plan a rest time for then. Refuse visitors and limit activities.

Accepting Support:

You don't have to do everything yourself!

Accepting support is a great way to look after yourselves. There are many tasks you may be doing, which other people would be happy to help you with. Allowing them to help lets them feel useful.

Accepting support will allow you to use your time wisely and take breaks when you need them.

Some tips to help you prioritise activity and accept help to suit you:

- What is the activity (e.g. cooking dinner).
- How important is the activity (e.g. very).
- When does the activity need to be done by? (e.g. tonight).
- Does it need to be done by me? (e.g. No).
- Could it be done by others? Who? (e.g. yes, my sister).
- **OUTCOME:** who will do the activity? (e.g. rang my sister and she will cook us dinner).

Who could I ask for help?

List the people who have offered to lend you a hand and what they could help you with:

Name	Phone Number	Jobs They Could Do



You might like to listen to this topic on the Ending Life Well Podcast available on most podcast sites and on the Otago Community Hospice webpage.

